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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1066/01 1101249
ZNY CCCCC ZZH ZDK CITING SEVERAL SVC'S
P 201249Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2756
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001066

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2019

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SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR IRAQI WIDOWS AND MINISTRY OF STATE FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

REF: SECSTATE 29965

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Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (C) In response to reftel, Post reports below on the current financial status of the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs (MoSWA), MoSWA's efforts to obtain international donor funding, and the poorly run GOI's widows stipend program. While current USAID assistance programs do not specifically target widows, a great number of USAID programs are for vulnerable women, including widows. Based on an expected new allocation in its FY 2009 budget, USAID intends to initiate a \$5 million program specifically for widows. PRTs run a number of assistance projects for widows and DRL-funded training centers in Baghdad and Basra provide widows with job skills to join the workforce. In an effort to curb the female suicide bomber (FSB) phenomenon, MNF-I has trained hundreds of female security personnel. MNF-I stresses that other women's development programs are just as important in countering recruitment of FSB. The Acting MoSWA and a member of Parliament believe the GOI does not intend to raise the MoSWA to cabinet ministry status. Forming a high commission for women's affairs appears to be the best option for seriously addressing women's rights and development issues. End summary.

MoSWA's Meager Finances

¶12. (C) Poloff spoke with an official in the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs (MoSWA), who reported that before the former MoSWA Dr. Nawal Al-Samara'e assumed office in July 2008, MoSWA's monthly office operating budget was three million Iraqi Dinars (ID, at current exchange rate approximately \$2500). For a period of several months during Dr. Al-Samara'e's tenure, this amount was raised to 10 million ID (\$8500). Late last year, it was reduced to two million ID (\$1,700), which apparently induced Dr. Al-Samara'e to resign in protest. (Note: None of the aforementioned sums include employee compensation. State ministries, such as MoSWA, are established by the Prime Minister to fulfill a political obligation and function on a token budget. End Note.)

Inefficient Widows Stipend Program

¶13. (C) Head of Parliament's Committee for Women, Family, and Childhood Samira Al-Musawi confirmed that registering for a widows stipend is difficult, especially for women who are illiterate and live in the provinces. Al-Musawi noted that the process involves validation of documents at many levels of governance from the district level up to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA). Only then is a widow

eligible and it still may take a few months before payments are actually received.

¶4. (SBU) Al-Musawi told Poloff on April 6 that in January she convinced Prime Minister Al-Maliki to raise the widows stipend from 50,000 ID (\$42.00) to 65,000 ID (\$50.00) per month. (Note: The amount of 65,000 ID is for a widow who applies only for herself. If a widow has even one child, the amount is raised to 150,000 ID (\$126.00) with 15,000 ID added for each additional child. End note.) She said that widows receive work training in addition to the stipend, and when they are qualified and employed, would no longer receive the stipend. (Comment: Al-Musawi's comment seems unrealistic, given the unlikely prospect of employing a million or more widows. End comment.) Al-Musawi believes the best way for the USG to help improve conditions for widows and other women is to propose and support programs through the MoSWA and Ois to propose and support programs through the MoSWA and MoLSA.

¶5. (C) UNAMI reports that so far only about 10 percent of eligible widows are actually in receipt of payments due to a number of issues, including their not knowing how to apply and MoLSA's slow processing of the backlog of claims. UNAMI noted the ICRC plans to undertake a pilot project to assist widows in filing for the stipend and will document the project, so the findings can be used to improve the process. UNAMI would also like to use the project's findings in developing its UNDP-designed public service reform program.

Donors Step Up

¶6. (C) The former MoSWA Dr. Al-Samara'e reported after her resignation last February that she received pledges of assistance from three international aid organizations and

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that more than 50 Iraqi women offered to volunteer to implement MoSWA's plans. This response encouraged her to withdraw her resignation and request to be reinstated; her request was denied. The Acting MoSWA Dr. Khoud Al-Ma'joun is soliciting assistance from international organizations, including UNAMI and UNIFEM, both of which are making efforts to support MoSWA.

Snapshot of USAID's Current Support to Widows

¶7. (C) Currently, USAID and its implementing partners do not specifically target or track widows at the program level. However, several activities within USAID programs do specifically benefit widows. Furthermore, many activities that fall within the Community Action Program (CAP) target vulnerable women, including widows. USAID's Marla Ruzicka Iraq War Victims Fund (Marla Fund) perhaps benefits the highest percentage of widows of any current USAID program. Many Marla Fund projects provide support to widows in the form of assistance to their microenterprises. For example, the Marla Fund provided support to a widow in northern Iraq to start a grocery store in her village. The Marla Fund provided the widow's shop with refrigeration equipment, groceries, and other basic necessities for reselling to the community.

¶8. (C) Other current USAID/Iraq programs have activities that also reach widows. For example, forty-eight Iraq Rapid Assistance Program/Quick Response Funds (IRAP/QRF) projects implemented through the PRTs directly benefit women, totaling \$4.5 million - of which 25% directly target widows. One IRAP/QRF project, The Iraqi Widows and Orphan Empowerment Project (\$125,000), is providing training in computer literacy, dress-making, business skills, Arabic literacy, and other skills to widows and orphans. With support of an IRAP/QRF project, the Adwaniyah Sewing Cooperative (\$50,000) is establishing sewing centers that will provide widows the

opportunity to socialize while they work and in turn generate an income.

¶19. (C) USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) program also has activities that benefit widows. The Livelihood Assets projects in Amirli and Sarha distributed non-food items to 357 Internally Displaced Person (IDP) widow-headed families living in Kirkuk to respond to their immediate needs. In addition, an OFDA activity subsidized awareness courses in cholera prevention training for 350 widow-headed families and supported family income through a cash for training arrangement.

Future USAID Support For Widows

¶10. (C) Based on the latest iteration of the FY 2009 Supplemental Budget, later this year USAID plans to initiate a \$5 million project specifically targeting widows. USAID expects to implement the program through an NGO and local widows-support organizations. Further, the \$3.5 million in FY 2009 Supplemental funding allocated for the Marla Ruzicka Iraq War Victims Fund (Marla Fund) would be utilized with a more explicit focus on widows.

OPA Assistance to Widows Through QRF

¶11. (C) In 2008, in addition to the IRAP/ORF programs implemented by PRTs as identified in the previous paragraphs, the Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) QRF program funded several smaller PRT widow-specific projects totaling a little more than \$300,000. These projects included buying cows and sheep for widows as income generation; providing business training; teaching sewing techniques, computer skills, and basic nursing skills; and developing beekeeping and honey production. Many other smaller ORF projects directly benefit women in general and often include widows among the recipients, such as a handicraft small business training program intended for IDPs.

G/IWI and DRL Grantee-Run Programs for Widows

¶12. (C) The Iraq Foundation, a G/IWI-funded grantee whose programs are managed by DRL, operates training centers for widows in Baghdad and Basra. The centers teach basic literacy, sewing and dressmaking, and computer and English language skills. They also offer courses in daycare center administration. Over 400 widows are currently enrolled in both cities, and the Baghdad and Basra centers recently held their first graduation ceremony. IF Director Rend Al-Rahim told Poloff April 19 that she is developing a concept paper to expand the program and will submit it to the State

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Department for funding in the near future.

Programs Countering Female Suicide Bomber Recruitment

¶13. (C) MNF-I reports that MNF-W trained 105 and MNF-N trained 604 Daughters of Iraq (DOI) security personnel, who are currently employed to prevent female suicide bombers (FSB) from carrying out their missions. The DOI program for Baghdad has been transferred to the GOI. MNF-I stressed that all its initiatives, including education, employment and economic development programs, contribute to countering FSB recruitment.

Women's Affairs Ministry vs. Commission

¶14. (C) According to the Acting MoSWA Dr. Al-Ma'joun, the MoSWA will not be elevated to full cabinet ministry status

because GOI leadership has no interest in doing so. Dr. Al-Ma'joun and Samira al-Musawi believe a High Commission for Women's Affairs would be far more effective, because a commission would need to be approved by Parliament and be allocated a program budget. It would, therefore, likely be better resourced than a weak minister of state. For these reasons, a women's affairs commission could be a far more effective tool for advancing women's rights and development. We believe it is essential that the head of a women's affairs commission be someone who will get the members of the commission to agree on urgent priorities for improving conditions for widows (and all women) and work together to make women's affairs a significant issue for Parliament and the GOI leadership.

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